

newsletter for nurturing support groups

Issue 37
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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 37th issue of **WE**, a newsletter for and about groups of people who get together for the purpose of giving each other personal support. This issue is about **FEELINGS** and features **Carole Gesme's game, "Ups & Downs with Feelings."** Included is:

- a picture of the feelings board
 - a description of the game
 - a couple of special activities Carole invented for this issue
 - Carole's thoughts on the role of play in learning to accept feelings
 - a set of the new Educational Affirmation ovals or balloons
- Enjoy!

Jean Mlsley Clarke

WHY I CREATED THIS GAME FEELINGS ARE IMPORTANT

By Carole Gesme

I created the game **Ups & Downs With Feelings** to aid school age children and adults in identifying and dealing with their feelings rather than burying them or turning them off, which was what I did to survive in my own family of origin.

The series of seven games aids children and adults in identifying and dealing with their feelings by:

1. becoming aware of their own feelings.
2. owning their feelings.
3. putting names to their feelings so they can describe them.
4. learning about Affirmations and how to use them in dealing with feelings, their own and others.
5. having fun.

I call my game **Ups & Downs With Feelings** because I found as I allowed myself to feel my feelings and deal with them I'd make some mistakes and experience ups and downs. Often, by using the Affirmations, I'd deal with the feeling or experience and then pick myself up again. I saw this process as a balloon soaring along—dipping down and soaring upward again.

I learned that I am in charge of my feelings and my feelings depend on how I see certain things. My feelings are facts. No one else can make me feel.

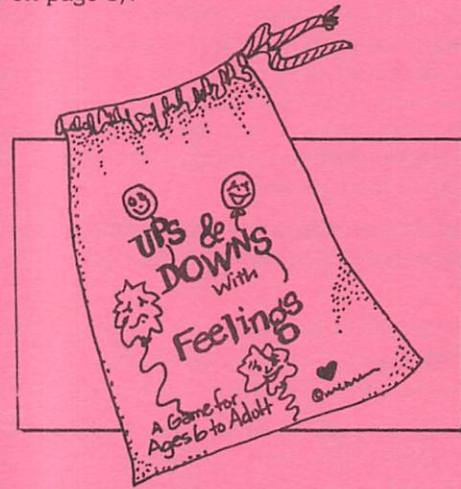
I learned that I usually know how to handle the feelings that helped me feel up. They are comfortable feelings and help me feel good. I like to feel loved and happy. And it was also important to deal with uncomfortable feelings, like feeling scared or sad or angry. Sometimes I used these fearsome ones to help make changes for the better or help me do something I needed to do.

I learned that there are many different kinds of feelings—some

good, some bad. It is OK to have all of these feelings. If we learn to recognize our bad feelings and talk about them, we can learn to do something about these feelings and feel better again.

THE GAME

"Ups & Downs With Feelings" is packaged in a cloth bag. It contains a 12 x 17½ inch feeling faces game board (see a reduced picture on page 3).



There are directions, playing pieces and cards for seven games.

1. Guess the Face

The purpose of this game is to become acquainted with the faces on the board and to have FUN.

2. Know Your Board

This game helps the player connect the faces with the feeling words on the sides of the game board.

3. Story Time

A great way to gain skill in telling stories about feelings.

4. Feeling Up and Down

Have FUN with this game and be the first to reach the "I'M A WINNER" square.

5. Affirmation Feel-O

Becoming familiar with the developmental affirmations is the object of this game.

6. Balloon Repair Kit

A good game for learning to identify feelings, and to choose affirmations that relate to those feelings.

7. Connection

Enjoy this game to help connect feelings with life experiences. Learn to use the affirmations to help **CELEBRATE LIFE** or feel differently in those experiences.

The game had been tested in many areas and is being used in schools, homes, pediatrician offices, chemical dependency treatment and prevention programs, hearing impaired programs, Sunday School classes, Confirmation classes, prisons, and centers for run-away youths. ■

*d*ear Reader,

Carole Gesme has asked me to evaluate her game, "Ups and Downs With Feelings", and I do this most enthusiastically.

I have used the game in several arenas. I have played it with other adults. I have used it with my own children who are two and four years of age and I have several game boards in my offices. I am a pediatrician with Group Health, Inc./St. Paul Medical Center.

I have found the game extremely useful for myself, my children, my patients and my friends. I have used the game board as a way to focus on feelings that children or adults are experiencing. We also used it to move through feelings; i.e., If I am particularly late coming in the office and people are angry about this, many times by acknowledging and validating the feeling, we can then move on to the work we need to do and complete the patient encounter.

I have found that we usually go through a certain progression using the board:

1. The many faces available give permission for the individual to feel what they are feeling.
2. Frequently, after that feeling is identified, it can then be validated and the individual learns that others "have been there" too. This allows the patient to more completely "own" the feeling.
3. After someone acknowledges his feeling, he is then frequently able to "move on" and not stay stuck with unwanted feelings. I believe the board itself offers permission to change feelings with the plethora of faces present.

I have also found for myself that many faces of the unbroken balloons are so appealing that I am motivated to change and join the "happy crowd."

Another way I found the game useful in my practice is that I often am surprised how people feel in certain situations. I have once again learned how much and how often I assume feelings for others.

The board is also very useful in prompting and facilitating discussion between children and parents. I frequently find out that communication problems stem from misassumptions about who is feeling what. I believe parents learn how much they assume for their children.

I also believe that because the positive faces are present and people can easily see alternatives where they may want to be, it is easier for them to figure out concrete ways of getting there.

As I stated originally, I find the game board, itself, very useful with preschool children. One of the tasks of a preschool child is to learn about his feelings by identifying and honoring them. The board helps make this a fun and easy task. I am so impressed with this tool that I have been rather forcefully requesting that Carole manufacture a less expensive version for preschoolers and their families.

I am thoroughly impressed with the thoughtfulness that has gone into the various games and the game board and am excited by the changes I see people able to make using it. I believe the effectiveness of the board is very closely related to the careful attention to detail as well as the tremendous creative energy that Carole has put into the game.

Sincerely,

Christine L. Ternand, M.D.

Christine Ternand, M.D. ■

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

A PENNY FOR YOUR FEELING

By Carole Gesme

You can try out the game board by playing the following game.

1. Lay the game board on the table. Place a stack of pennies beside it.
2. Start with the youngest person in the group.
3. Each person reads one feeling word from the edge of the board, each player places a penny on the face that corresponds to the feeling. There are no right or wrong answers.
4. Notice which feelings everyone chooses the same face for. Notice for which feelings people choose different faces.
5. Do not try to get anyone to agree. Compliment each other on matching a feeling with a face that is true for them. ■

GAMES: A POTENT TOOL FOR EDUCATION

When I was teaching SELF-ESTEEM: A FAMILY AFFAIR parenting class to court-ordered adults, I found that some of them were hostile toward the material and the classes. I also found that if I created games with much of the course material, the adults learned faster, accepted the material, and had fun.

I decided that as part of my master's degree program, I would investigate the possibilities of using the games I have created to promote learning.

Play for many adults is what children do and what adults can do in their leisure time. Adults think that playing games and having fun are frivolous pastimes. The rule is to work first and have fun later. On the other hand, children know that play is serious business. Playing is their natural way of expressing themselves; it is their work. I have found in my classes that encouraging adults to play one game each week has provided a whole new arena of learning experiences. Playing games has proved to be "serious business" for adults as well as children.

These are the things that I have observed:

When I say "Let's play a game," some adults in my classes respond to messages in their heads that say, "Playing is not important," "Stop playing around," "She's only playing" or "Don't play with your food." Some people relax and become more able to learn because the invitation to play has given them permission and freedom to try new behaviors. Sometimes playing games allows people to make mistakes and not have to be perfect, or it allows them to trust that they won't be graded or evaluated. Some also can feel awkward and fall flat on their faces when they are playing a game without fear of failure. The feeling games give adults permission to play out feelings and problems and in the process, learn new ways of dealing with them.

When play is governed by rules or conventions, it's called a game. Games teach adults and children how to live together by following rules. When the adults in my classes play my games, I have noticed several positive changes in social interaction. Perhaps because games provide:

1. Mutual involvement. People playing a game are actively involved in a shared activity.
2. Interactions. Interpersonal communications are characterized by turn taking. "I've finished. It's your turn."
3. Repetition. Because there is no end to the game, the adults can repeat the activities until they are satisfied.
4. Enjoyment. ■

HOW TO NURTURE WHILE YOU ARE LEADING A GROUP

These are the responses to a Suggestion Circle on the question: "What are some specific ways to offer nurturing during class to an individual who is especially needy without marshmallowing that person?"

- Get up, move over to the person.
- Join the person when you divide into groups.
- Stroke people for their individual participation.
- Make eye contact.
- Make an effort to interact with the person during exercises.
- Touch.
- Say their name. Emphasize their importance.
- Sit next to them.
- Focus attention on them or keep attention off them, whichever they prefer.
- Offer an energy circle.

ENERGY CIRCLE

People stand in a circle and the person receiving energy stands in front of each person in turn and receives supportive eye contact and loving energy given from the heart through the hands held palms up. No words.

GROUND RULES PROVIDE PROTECTION FOR FEELINGS

The consistent use of specific ground rules in a group provides protection for the people in the group by creating a predictable structure.

The ground rule, *Meetings will start and stop on time*, provides a lot of protection. If I am late I know the group will not be mad at me because they waited for me. I can plan to attend a party following the meeting and count on getting there. I won't have to miss part of the fun. I can assure the baby sitter that I will not be late, and know that I won't be embarrassed by breaking my word.

Pick one of the ground rules that you use in your meetings and think of all the ways that rule creates a structure that provides protection for people's feelings in the meeting.

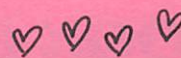
Check each of the following ground rules to see if each provides you with protection for your own feelings.

GROUND RULES

- Everyone Participates
 - Right to Pass
- All Beliefs Are Honored
 - Mutual Respect
 - Confidentiality
- Start & Stop on Time

Opening Activity

For Thinking About Feelings

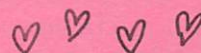


Hand out name tags. Ask people to choose a partner. Make a name tag for her and ask her to tell about a person she knows who is good at expressing feelings in an appropriate way.

Introduce your partner and tell the group one positive way of expressing feelings.

Closing Activity

That Offers Everyone a Positive Personal Message



- At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.
- Ask each person to say one feeling word that describes a feeling he had during the meeting. For example: excited, glad, comfortable, scared, bored.
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.
- Ask everyone to say the following affirmation aloud together: "My feelings are mine and they are important to me."

Facilitator Training Workshops

February 2-6, 1987
Minneapolis, MN

A week-long workshop for people who want to . . .

- Facilitate the *Self-Esteem: A Family Affair* parenting model, or
- Improve group leadership skills for working with growth, education, or support groups.
- Receive advanced training in the use of Transactional Analysis in educational settings.

Led by Jean Illsley Clarke or Gail Nordeman.
Write to WE for details.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY FACES

Point to a face and tell a time you felt that way. Choose the affirmation that helps you keep that feeling if it is positive or let it go if it is negative. Read the affirmation aloud.



BOOK REVIEW:

"Are You Still My Mother? Are You Still My Family?"

by Gloria Guss Back is more than a fast paced factual book on homosexuality. It is a support book in the true sense of the word. A realistic sharing and caring of distraught parents, soul-searching their past for the reasons, even the possible moment of homosexual awareness in their child. When Back's youngest son, Kenny, announced that he was gay the author went through steps similar to "Death and Dying." Struggling with self-denial, anger, guilt and humiliation she questioned, "Have I been too controlling a parent?" "Where did I go wrong?" "Can't you just be that way and keep it quiet?"

Back reached out for organizational support that was non-existent. This prompted her, within her field of social work, to found a series of workshops. Parents responded frankly to her questions on homosexuality with opinions from acceptance to beliefs that gay's and lesbians are unnatural, they need a cure for their disease and that therapy might reverse their sexual preference. Most, but not all parents were able to reconstruct a new image—a new acceptable life style for their son and his lover.

Back is thorough in her research:

She questioned individuals within the medical and religious fields;

Received input from parents of gays as well as information from the gay child;

Included on-going workshop discussions allowing us to follow an individual's personal growth;

Presented realistic suggestions on coping;

Included a bibliography for further study.

Back's book is especially beneficial for persons who have just been confronted with "the" statement from their child. For them

sharing this problem with business associates and neighbors is a long way off. The numerous vignettes, however, reinforce the fact that—they are not alone. That others have anguished over homophobic feelings and have also feared losing touch with their son or daughter.

To dispel preconceived ideas and nudge even the rigid mind, a heterosexual questionnaire is included.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you might grow out of?
3. Can't you just be heterosexual and keep it quiet?

Gloria Guss Back presents a healthy outlook on an emotional subject. It's definitely one to read.

Review by Joann Reisberg



PLAY

We don't stop playing
when we grow old;
we grow old when
we stop playing.
—Anonymous



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- Suggested activities
- Thoughts on theory and purpose of support groups
- News from other support groups

WE

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